

**INTERVIEW OF U.S.COAST GUARD OFFICERS
CDR. CAMERON
LCDR. FISHER
CWO BOYER
GROUP ACTIVITIES NEW YORK
ON NOVEMBER 22,2000
REGARDING NEW YORK WATERWAYS
(OWNER OF PORT IMERIAL MANHATTAN)**

4 PAGES (INCLUDING THIS COVER)



**National
Transportation
Safety Board**

Notes of Interview

Date: November 22, 2000

Place: U.S. Coast Guard Activities New York Fort
Wadsworth
Staten Island, New York

Time: 0900 –1100 EST

**Persons
Interviewed:** CWO Boyer, USCG
LCDR Fisher, USCG
CDR Cameron, USCG

INTRODUCTION

I visited the U.S. Coast Guard Activities New York to interview the above listed Coast Guard officers who purported to be knowledgeable of the operation of passenger vessels operated by New York Waterways. I met with all three officers at the same time. The text that follows is not a verbatim record of my conversation. It has been constructed from my handwritten notes taken at the time of the conversation.

CONVERSATION

The Coast Guard officers explained that New York Waterways operates the largest fleet of small passenger vessels within the New York zone. They estimated that New York Waterways vessels carry between 20,000 and 30,000 passengers each day.¹

¹ For contrast, the officers stated, the Staten Island Ferry Service carries 60,000 passengers each day. However, Staten Island Ferries are inspected and regulated under a different set of regulations. New York Waterways vessels are all inspected and regulated under 46 CFR Subchapter T while Staten Island Ferry vessels are inspected and regulated under 46 CFR Subchapter H.

The Coast Guard officers explained that they do not consider New York Waterways vessels to meet the technical definition of "ferry." This is because, while ferry routes are strictly defined between point A and point B, the routes of New York Waterways vessels are less specific. Moreover, they pointed out, the New York Waterways vessels are frequently used in non-ferry passenger vessel service (excursions, tours, etc) during non-commuting hours.²

According to the Coast Guard officers (all were in agreement) of the five (5) companies operating passenger ferries in their zone³, New York Waterways has the worst compliance record, as far as compliance with Coast Guard marine inspection regulations are concerned. According to them, there are about 250 small passenger vessels operating in their zone (the actual number ranges between 230-270) and that New York Waterways represents about 10% of the fleet. Even so, these officers estimated that the Coast Guard spends about 25% of its small passenger vessel inspection effort dealing with New York Waterways.

According to these Coast Guard officers, New York Waterways has recently gone through an aggressive growth period, including new construction of four vessels (the last of these scheduled for delivery in February 01) and the 1999 purchase of five older vessels from another company. They speculated that the rapid growth of the company in the last few years has been too much for company management officials to keep up with. On top of rapid growth, the Coast Guard officers said, the company has had a rapid turnover in operations managers. They said that there have been 3 different operations managers in the last year. The difficulties between the company and the Coast Guard came to a head in September 1999. At this time, as a result of the large number of overdue⁴ safety requirements issued to the vessels in its fleet, the Coast Guard ordered 11 of the company's vessels to stop operating until the outstanding safety deficiencies were corrected. According to the Coast Guard officers, all 11 vessels were back in service within 2 days.

The officers were unanimous in their opinion that the company has made significant improvements in how it operates since the September 1999 incident. They attribute these improvements to a change in management personnel and policy. The

² In accordance with 46 CFR 175.400, Ferry means a vessel that:

- (1) Operates in other than ocean or coastwise service;
- (2) Has provisions only for deck passengers or vehicles, or both;
- (3) Operates on a short run on a frequent schedule between two points over the most direct water route; and
- (4) Offers a public service of a type normally attributed to a bridge or a tunnel.

³ The five ferry operators are as follows: Yellow Taxi (2/3 boats), Hydroline Sea Express (2 boats), New York Fast Ferries (2 boats), New York Waterways (24 boats), and the Staten Island Ferries.

⁴ The Coast Guard officers said that some of the deficiencies had been outstanding for more than a year at the time this action was taken.

officers commented favorably on the current operations manager and on the company's decision to give mid-level operations managers the authority to take vessels out of service for maintenance reasons. Furthermore, they agree, that the current management scheme places the responsibility for satisfying outstanding safety requirements with a single management point of contact, so that there is "ownership of the problem" within the company. They agree that since these changes have been instituted by the company, the number of outstanding requirements is down, and those that remain outstanding are easier to track.

END OF INTERVIEW

Donald J. Tyrrell
Investigator-In-Charge